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SONGS OF A NURSE



BY

MARGARET HELEN FLORINE, R.N.

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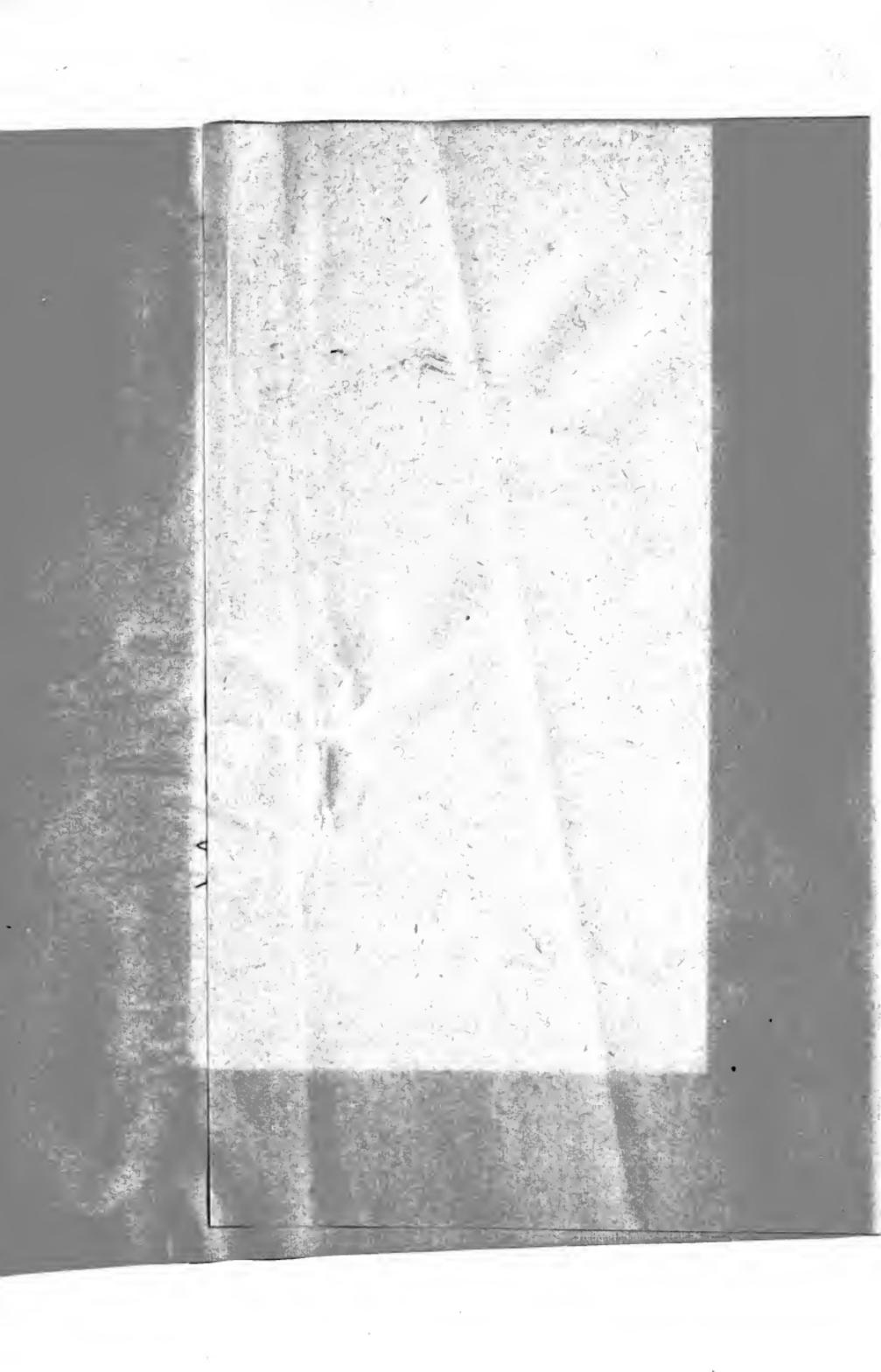
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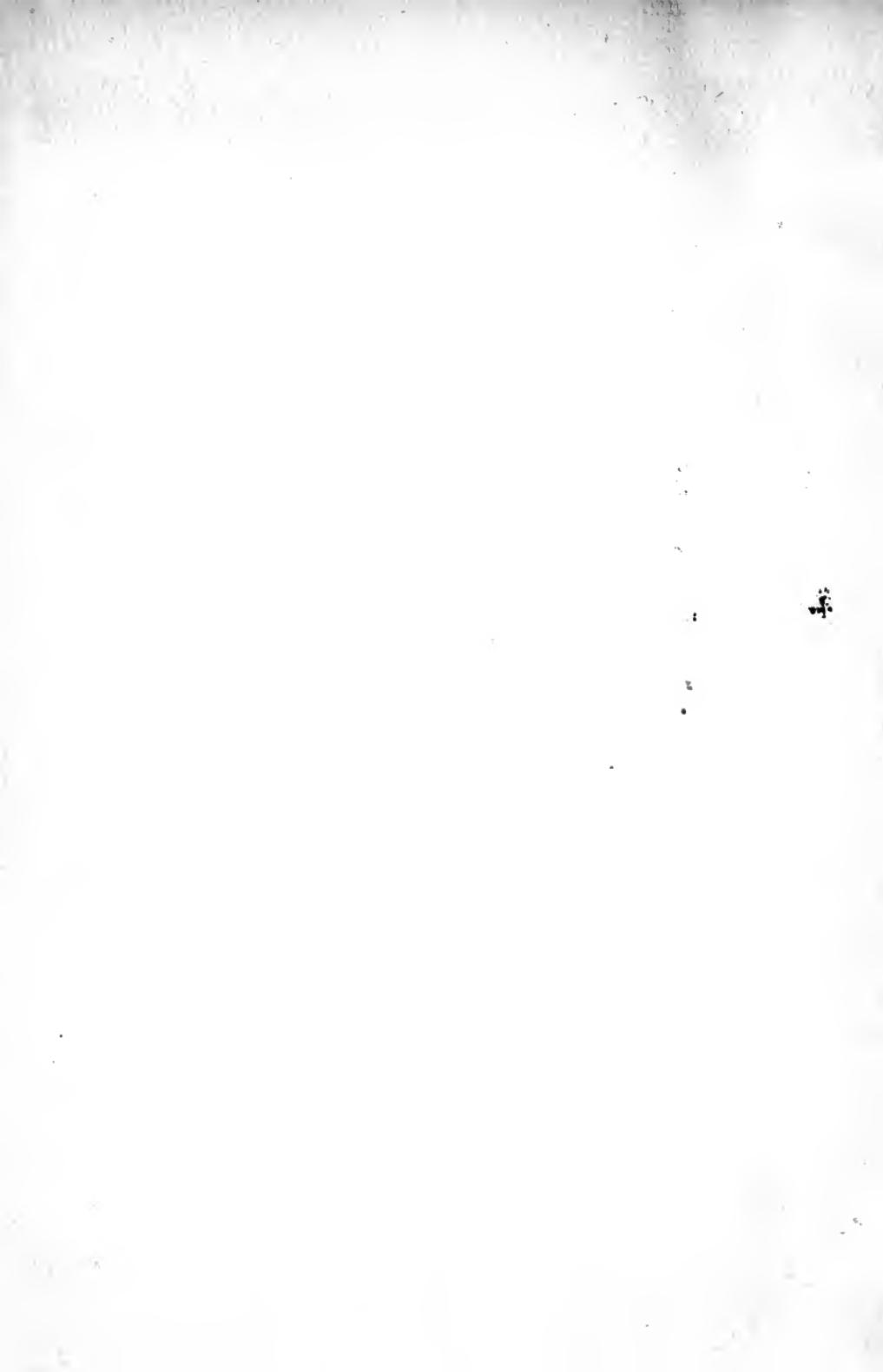
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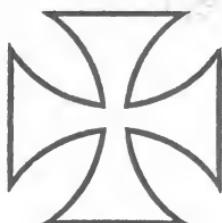




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BY

MARGARET HELEN FLORINE, R. N.



PHILOPOLIS PRESS
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
MDCCCCXVII

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TO
A— V— R—.

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SONGS OF A NURSE.

THE HOSPITAL.

Thou art severely rigid, grim, austere
To those who merely pass before thy gate,
But once within thy portals, gone is fear,
Thou givest hope to sorrow, love for hate.

Thou openest thine ample arms to all,
The beggar by the wayside, as to wealth;
All honor to thee! may thou never fall,
Thou calm, majestic, sentinel of health!



THE SURGEON.

With heart of iron, yet tender as a child,
Your brain alert to every passing need,
With master wisdom, technique undefiled
And scalpel keen, you follow Duty's lead.

Long, anxious hours you spend that we may live
Our lives as our Creator wisely planned ;
Your heart and soul to us you gladly give,
You're God's own faithful helper—His right hand.

THE PSYCHIATRIST.

It's not the human wreckage near at hand,
His vision—penetrating, keen—discerns,
But with a gaze we cannot comprehend
He peers behind the curtain of the past.
He sees the lives our forebears and their kin
Were wont to live;
He judges not. To his perceptive eye
Our heritage is as an open book
Where he can read that deeds—both good and bad—
Live on—through us—as long as Time shall last.

THE PHYSICIAN.

Forgetting self, he heeds your call
Nor cares he what the hour;
Your anxious heart is filled with hope,
You feel his hidden power.
He enters softly—lest you sleep—
And sits beside your bed,
He scans your face, a tender hand
Is placed upon your head.

His stethoscope to beating heart,
Percussion over lung,
Blood pressure, pulse and temperature,
A brief view of your tongue,
A question here, a symptom there
Makes diagnosis plain;
With potion, powder, salve and pill,
He thwarts the Reaper's game.

THE PATIENT.

We rub you, scrub you,
Take you out and tub you,
Treat you as a mother does her child;
Knead you, feed you,
Back to health we lead you,
Train you, restrain you, until you're nearly wild.

We mould you, hold you,
Sometimes wish to scold you,
But know that bad behavior is included in the game;
We chide you, guide you,
Sit all night beside you
To ease you and please you, for we love you just the same.

THE NURSE.

With magic touch to fevered brow,
To ease your pain her only thought,
Earnest, quiet, swift and calm,
Divining wishes, praise unsought,

On silent, willing feet, she goes
Your perfect comfort first she seeks ;
Her only dreams are health for you,
As she her lonely vigil keeps.

Your life ! what splendid recompense
For those three golden years she gave !
An autocrat, a selfless soul,
Your stern commander, yet your slave.

THE NIGHT NURSE.

TO M. L. R.

Your day begins when others' work is done,
With duties far more arduous than they know;
For Hope has flown, her daily course is run;
She vanished with the sunset's purple glow.

When she departs, the night looms long and black
And filled with terrors never known by day;
Sufferings increase a hundred-fold, to rack
These anguished victims, tortured bits of clay.

You calm and comfort with your words of cheer,
And smooth the bed to snare the vagrant, Sleep;
You try to lure a truant dream, but fears
Like spectres grim around the helpless creep.

Your task is thankless, for as day returns
With fickle Hope, you see your efforts scorned.
Your sole reward within your own heart burns,
The knowledge of duty faithfully performed.

THE PROBATIONER.

You stand upon the threshold of a world
Far different from the one you've always known,
Where Pain, a cruel, imperious monarch rules
A world to which the password is a moan.

Here linger wretches expiating sins
And little children branded at their birth ;
As each new horror flays your bleeding faith,
You feel there's but scant justice on this earth.

You see the day-dreams, cherished in your heart,
Consumed by fires of hopeless, losing fights,
But from their ashes — phœnix-like — will rise
Finer ideals and to greater heights.

THE SURGERY.

This is the place
To bring your case,
 Old bodies made like new.
We renovate,
Rejuvenate,
 Restore and alter, too.

With needle keen
We sew a seam
 Warranted not to tear.
We never shirk;
It is our work
 To fashion and repair.

We've scissors new,
A sponge or two,
 Solution, suture, knife;
Oh, why delay?
Obtain today
 A brand new lease on life.

THE ANÆSTHETIC.

“Take one deep breath and let sweet slumber creep
Like a sigh;
Take another, you ’ll be fast asleep.”
What a lie!

I smell the gas and ether yet,
It took a ton or more, I bet,
I know I never shall forget
Till I die!

WHITE MAGIC.

Take a firm grasp of the flesh
'Twixt the finger and the thumb,
Cleanse the surface thoroughly
And rub until it's numb.
Plunge the needle surely, gently,
Careful—not too deep—

* * * *

Lo! the wretched sufferer
Lies peacefully asleep.

MY BED.

My bed is very, very high
So my good nurse may see;
It's also very, very white
As all beds ought to be.
It is n't very, very wide—
Of falling out, I've fears—
But it is very like a rock
That's *been* a rock for years.

MY TRAY.

What! prunes again this morning?
They're good for me, you say?
And if they are, that doesn't mean
I want them every day.
I like fried eggs and pie and stew,
Rich pastry, cheese and pepper, too;
Or just plain caviare would do.

A BOTTLE OF ETHER.

Thine is the crystal clearness of pure streams
As from the earth they make their primal leap,
The icy-coldness of the snow that seems
A diadem eternal of the steep.
Thy pungent odor weaves fantastic dreams,
Thou ever-wondrous, pent-up, liquid sleep.

HOPE.

Dear Hope, when thou art standing
Beside my bed of pain,
I feel that health and laughter
Wilt soon be mine again.

But when thou goest on thy way,
In other fields to roam,
I know that I shall suffer here
Until God calls me home.

THE MORNING CALL.

When breakfast's o'er, my bath is done,
 My room is neat to see,
The event of the day takes place,
 My doctor visits me.

I hear his light step in the hall,
 Away goes every doubt!
His face reflects the morning sun
 Though it be cloudy out.

He brings me visions of my health,
 And thoughts of happy hours
Mid clover 'neath the country skies,
 With bees and fragrant flowers.

I have a host of aches and pains,
 But I forget them all,
Unless—as happened one dark day—
 He does n't make his call!

“JUST TONSILS.”

I thought that tonsils were a joke
Until I had mine “out”,
I used to smile and wonder
What the fuss was all about.
One day the doctor told me
My sore throat needed care,
He placed me on the table
And applied the little snare.

* * * *

When I awoke my throat felt like
The giraffe's in the zoo,
And every time I'd swallow
It would last an hour or two.
I could n't eat, I could n't sleep,
I wished that I were dead;
I lost my patience and ten pounds
And spent two weeks in bed.

THE CHEERFUL LIAR.

When my temperature's up like a hot summer day
She tells me it's ninety-eight-four;
When the nourishment taken refuses to stay,
It's what she expected; take more!

When my head nearly bursts and I can't get my breath,
She says all I need is to sneeze;
When I'm seized with a pain that foretells instant death,
It's but one phase of my disease.

When the poor beggar next to me passes beyond,
She says he's been moved for more air;
When my life she has saved and of her I am fond,
She declares 'twas my doctor's good care.

While I know that quite often she tells me a lie,
Her reasons, I'm sure, are the best;
I believe, in the great things of life, she would die
Before she would tell an untruth.
That's the test!

“IN THE SILENT WATCHES.”

When darkness throws her sable mantle down
And midnight goes to join the long ago,
When all the world is hushed in slumber deep,
The tide of human life is ebbing low.

I sit beside you with your hand in mine
That I may feel each beat of your faint heart;
Nor do my eyes stray from your pallid face,
Lest Atropos—with keen shears—do her part.

I sense the presence of the Reaper grim
As if a living thing beside me stands,
Who, should my earnest vigilance relax,
Would seize you with his grasping, fleshless hands.

The crimson dawn is glowing in the east,
The birds—awaking—softly twitter; then
Old Death is cheated for another day,
As the tide of life comes flowing in again.

THE HYPOCHONDRIAC.

My liver is not up to par,
 My heart's below the mark;
I have such agonizing pain
 To suffer after dark.

There are stabbing, piercing, shooting pains —
 Some sharp and others dull,
Which stab and pierce and shoot me
 Through the night, without a lull.

And then my spleen is quite enlarged,
 My stomach's on the "bum",
My spine has two decided curves,
 While feet and hands are numb.

My appetite is very poor —
 For all I look so stout —
Just what is really wrong with me
 The doctors can't find out.

They've analyzed and sterilized
 And hypnotized me, too;
Examined, thumped and pounded me
 Until I'm black and blue.

THE HYPOCHONDRIAC.

The osteopath says it's the spine—
I told you of those curves—
The allopath says too much fat,
The specialist, my nerves;
The dentist lays it to my teeth,
The oculist, my eyes;
The homeopath says, "Nothing much,"
Of *all* the dreadful lies!
Now, what will happen to me next
I'm sure I cannot tell;
What grieves me most is when friends say
"You look *extremely* well!"

A CRIPPLED CHILD.

Pale as a little flower grown in deep shadow,
A silent confession of suffering's toll,
Wee bit of earthenware, broken but useful,
The sacred abode of a lone, captive soul.

AT THE ZOO.

“These nurses are trained,”
Said the six year old child ;
“Now mother, please show me
The ones that are wild.”

THE ENIGMA.

I sometimes think there's not much left
To learn, in all this world.

Still, tho' I've searched, there's nothing I can find
Of the man who has, in detail,
Mastered all the subtleties
Of the inner workings of the human mind.

There are maps and charts to guide us
Wherever we may go,

Great helps in reaching almost any goal;
Yet there's nothing to assist us
In our unavailing quest
For the accurate location of the soul.

Man may conquer deserts, distance,
And the ever-changing air,

To the restless ocean, ships he gives.
Though for struggling masses round him
He can build to meet each need,
He can *never* build a thing that lives.

THE DRUG FIEND.

A million nerves within your wasted frame
Like starving wolves at your poor heart-strings tug.
A million torments that no one could name
Are yours, because of the accursèd drug.

You'd barter body, future, soul and all—
Of hope and love and life you'd toll the knell—
For cravings which compel you, yet appal,
You live within the very gates of hell.

And yet, your just Creator up above,
Who marks the sparrow's fall or notes his song—
Is merciful, forgiving, filled with love,
And in His unknown way, will right the wrong.

TO ONE BORN BLIND.

When God gave you eternal night,
Did he—to compensate your loss—
Give you the gift of happiness
To help you bear your heavy cross?
Or is it that there is no light—
Yours is not even vision dim—
So all hours are alike to you?
Or are you walking nearer Him?

A PRAYER.

Give me the strength to go my way,
A calm endurance for today;
Because my patient is a “crab”
A man to whom this world is drab.
Let me not hear him if he nags,
Or burn him with hot water bags.
If my soul be not wholly lost,
Adorn me with the iron cross;
But let it weigh a pound or two
And as a weapon it will do.
Then, if he still remains unkind,
His mourners may walk slow, behind.

A RAINY DAY.

The child was crying with his pain,
I said, "You've made the whole world cry."
He glanced out at the falling rain,
"World's got a hurt," was his reply.

GRIEF SUPREME.

If one's grief touches me more than another's—
A sorrow by self-pity undefiled—
It's the overwhelming anguish that's a mother's
As she kneels beside the clay that was her child.

SLUMBER.

God grants to each a space of time when he
May mark the strange adventures of his soul
As through a dim and filmy phantom gauze
Called sleep; and lest the charmèd spell be lost
'Tis meet that dream-dust from some twinkling star
Be gathered, ere the fragrant dusk departs.

Then can he wander through Elysian fields
And glimpse the fleeting joys of Arcady
Unshared by all the drowsing world, save one.

Mayhap a voyage on an inland sea
Of blue or jade or opalescent tint,
Where lotus-blossoms, wet with dew, still sleep,
Is his desire.

Or other calls allure,
And down the aisles of centuries long dead—
Where Memory weaves her fabric of lost dreams—
The misty, haunting, golden past is bridged
By hailing friends across unnumbered years,
Or hearing echoes of their distant song.

THE OLD SCHOOL.

Old "Doc" was everybody's friend,
The lowly and the rich ;
He never had a favorite in the game,
To all who came for treatment—
Regardless of the cause,
His method of procedure was the same.

" B —take thou —of calomel
With soda, seven grains,
And follow with a generous dose of salts :
Tomorrow start the quinine, iron
And strychnine after meals."
A process to correct most grievous faults.

If drastic measures you withstood
And lived to tell the tale,
In the future when not well, you'd keep it "mum."
But if the good Lord took you,
" Doc" would heave a sigh
And murmur, " Well, I guess his time had come."

REINCARNATION.

I close the old man's eyes, for he
No longer cares the path to see.

Old Charon ferries him across the stream;
I wonder—in the other land—
Just whose will be the loving hand
That wakens him from his long, peaceful dream?

I ope the little stranger's eyes
That he may see the path that lies

Before him—stretching far o'er field and stream;
I wonder—in that other land
Just whose kind, sympathetic hand
It was, that closed his eyes for his long dream?

THE VANDAL.

The poet sang to us long, long ago,
That "the body is the temple of the soul."
Two brothers coming to this world of woe,
Began a journey to the self-same goal.

One was given a hut for his soul's dwelling,
The other's temple finest marble white.
The first one found no gain from his rebelling,
So tried to make his meager lodging bright.

He early learned that earnest, watchful care
Was needed to prolong its feeble use ;
The other, thinking marble could not wear,
Heaped on his temple wanton, cruel abuse.

Years passed, and by the many storms of life,
Both temples were severely tempest-tossed ;
The hut, long past its time, withstood the strife,
The marble mansion crumbled and was lost.

SITTING UP.

Today I sat up in my chair
But nothing seemed quite right,
For pins and needles pricked each foot,
My head was very light.

TO A SUICIDE.

I think—as I look down on your calm face—

Of your lessons still unlearned, your songs unsung,
Your weak, tired feet that stumbled in the race,
Your tasks unfinished and your lute unstrung.

VERSATILITY—THOU JEWEL.

My patients wish to know my views
On higher education:—
Do Gentiles persecute the Jews?
What are we as a nation?
Do I like Ibsen or G. Shaw?
Is Tagore overdrawn?
Should women ever practice law?
Will peace come with the dawn?
And of my life beyond the grave
Just what is my intention?
In Europe who's the greatest knave?
What of the fourth dimension?
Is it quite just to hang a man?
Do two wrongs make a right?
Should woman ever smoke, and can
She fall in love at sight?
Do I believe in problem plays?
Or like the movie show?
And is it true the woman pays?
Is modern drama slow?

VERSATILITY—THOU JEWEL.

Is opera ever worth the price?
Does ragtime spell decay?
To dine unchaperoned quite nice?
All equal, as they say?
Do I like Bakst or Cubist art?
Was Nietzsche really sane?
Can time completely mend a heart?
Is suffrage on the wane?
Is there a real excuse for war?
Should we urge preparation?
Must we deny the Japs our door?
What of re-incarnation?
Is literature on the decline?
Do I read Maeterlinck;
Alas, no settled views are mine
I must agree; I dare not think!

PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

She knows that somewhere, somehow,
She defied the rules of health,
 And the laws of compensation never fail;
That she pays for her transgressions
With anguish, not mere wealth,
 And all her pleading is of no avail.

So she's courteous, considerate,
Kind, sweet and gentle, too,
 That her welfare's our first thought she can't forget;
She's aware that those around her—
Even though they gladly would—
 Cannot make the smallest payment on her debt.

She realizes that for love,
For faithfulness and care,
 The paltry sum she pays is not a lure,
But oh, the joy of serving her
And helping win her health,
 For should she die, 'twould leave the world *so* poor.

LIFE'S LESSON.

Those who have learned to meekly wait
With patience—some can never know—
Need not the laurel of the great
To crown their efforts here below.
Theirs is all joy the gods can give
For they, at least, have learned to live.

Learned to live for a few short years,
Only God knows the price they paid
In anguish, heartaches, bitter tears,
To what lone reaches their souls strayed.
The only peace this side the Gate
Is for the few who learn to wait.

TO RODIN'S "THE THINKER."

With silent, rugged head bowed on your hands
 You crouch, a figure pensive and austere,
As you struggle with your problem—all in vain—
 The age-old question of, "Why are we here?"

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

'Twas time to make the patient's bed,
I nearly caused a riot,
For there were many crumbs of bread,
And he was on a liquid diet.

RELIGION.

The question of religion is discussed with every nurse,
Some theories advanced are bad and others even worse.
When patients turn inquiring minds to ascertain my views,
They find I deem the smallest soul too valuable to lose.

I think this life may be compared unto a restless sea
And over it we all must cross, the helot and the free.
Since all are born and die alike—regardless of their forte—
It's probable that all are destined for the same, far port.

Religion is the method used to carry us across,
With what—to our near-visioned eyes—is a tremendous loss.
The liners represent the faiths in which the most believe
While smaller boats convey the few and drifting souls receive.

You may select the greyhound as best suited to your creed,
While I would find the smaller craft sufficient for my need;
We meet a man without a barque and stare aghast at him,
Perhaps his course is shallower or maybe he can swim.

RELIGION.

It's wrong to tempt the tiny boat to brave the briny deep,
Or wish the mammoth steamship by the unsafe shore to keep.
When you've secured your passage and embark to go your
way,
Just steer your vessel in its course and meet the Judgment
Day.

THE HARVEST.

You sow your wild oats unashamed,
Then drink of Lethe's stream;
But your begotten's vice, untamed,
Will wake you from your dream.

The wakening! bitter misery,
To see your nearest kin
Fettered for life—they should be free—
To pay the price of sin.

Atoning for sins not their own,
Through a mist of burning tears,
'Tis the harvest of the weeds you 've sown
In forgotten, by-gone years!

TO A RED CROSS NURSE.

You're as great as any hero,
In the bloody strife,
He can give unto his country
But one sacred life.

You, if faithful to your trust,
Send back, to satisfy the lust,
A hundred, who, when cause is just
Will follow drum and fife!

The hundred you return to fight
Have suffered, bled, faced death, and when
They *know* that they are in the right
Are worth two hundred other men.

THE GATE OF YOUTH.

Oh, youth—life's most wonderful gift,
 Refreshing as springtime's first breath,
As hallowed as some secret shrift,
 You're almost a triumph o'er death!

WHITHER ?

Thine eyes are closed for thy last sleep,
Before the mystery I bow,
And to my troubled mind there comes
This question, “Whither goest thou?”

ON THE SUN PORCH.

The day was bright and pleasant,
So my nurse procured a chair
And wheeled me to the sun porch,
That I might enjoy the air.

I had the very latest book
But did not read a word,
For patients were exchanging tales
And this is what I heard:

“In my gall-duct were fifty stones,
Some round and others square;
My doctor kept the specimen
Because my case was rare.”

“My tumor weighed some forty pounds—
Or maybe twenty-five—
Like yours, mine was a record case,
I’m glad to be alive.”

ON THE SUN PORCH.

“My appendix was a dreadful one,
Of all they’d seen, the worst,
Had I delayed another hour,
It would have surely burst.”

Just then the noon gong sounded,
I was glad to hear it ring,
For mere pneumonia in both lungs
Was not worth mentioning.

A SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT.

The heart-throbs of the nightingale,
 His tender song of love's delight,
The gleaming stars like priceless pearls
 Clasped on the bosom of the night,
The fireflies glowing in the sky,
 Small rainbows of pure, living light.

The whisper of the swaying trees,
 Where silver moonbeams shimmer fair,
The silence vast and mystical,
 The fragrant coolness of the air,
The midnight of the Universe
 With God—Eternal Sentry—there.

THE INVALID.

For many years her little world had lain
Within four dingy walls ; her only view
A blackened roof, a tiny bit of sky,
A straggling tree whose leaves—the first or last—
Told—without words—the season near at hand.

Her pilgrimage from bed to rocking chair—
Always with safe return at close of day—
Held, through the years, the same enchanting charm,
A real adventure old, yet ever new.

Her life seemed but an endless, living death ;
And as I laved the twisted, shrunken limbs,
The knotted, useless hands, and glimpsed her smile,
And heard her say that God is always good,
I cursed myself, base ingrate that I am.

“SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.”

Mourned from afar
By loving mothers, sweethearts, wives,
God's greatest work lies rotting
 “Somewhere in France”;
Gone for eternity
Those eager, fearless lives,
Leaving unborn millions
 A heritage—their chance!

THE NURSERY.

Your little flower-like faces
Where the bees of life may sip,
Are lilies fair and rosemary and rue;
Wee passengers just landed
From the unknown mystery-ship,
I wonder what the future holds for you?

THE REST CURE.

She brings her books and pictures,
Of lingerie, her best,
Then lets her friends discover
That she really needs a rest.

They send more books and quantities
Of choicest blossoms rare,
Pastry, candy, boudoir caps,
Things to eat and wear.

They come to visit her each day
And bring along a friend
Who tells her all the latest news,
Such busy hours they spend!
It seems quite like a merry jest
For she does *everything* but rest.

MATERNITY.

At last your agonizing travail nears
And you, on your solitary journey start
To the Valley of the Shadow, land of tears,
With a prayer upon your lips, joy in your heart.

It matters not—the anguish of the hour—
For you have given all there is to give;
You reach the very zenith of your power
When you grant a human soul the right to live.

The treasure of the ages is your own,
The childless queen a beggar in your sight.
God pity her whose ruthless acts, alone,
Deny some soul its vision of the light!

REFLECTED GLORY.

Long weeks they battled for a precious life,
And then the welcome flag of truce unfurled.
The crisis safely passed—in fevers rife—
The doctor—proven victor in the strife—
Was given all the glory by the world.

In uniform and cap behind him stands
A silent, potent factor in the fight;
The one who labored on, obeyed commands,
Whose constant care and faithful, loving hands
Helped lead that straying life from dark to light.

TO PAIN.

While thy black magic I still spurn,
Prostrate before its strength I lie,
Craving the privilege to die
Ere faith and courage wholly burn;
Fearful, as more of thee I learn,
Bound by unyielding, trenchant tie,
Worn with my hopeless, futile cry,
Away from thy cruel clutch I turn.

Oh, Pain thou monster hideous,
Cursed enemy I fain would see,
Art thou some power insidious
Whose grim task is to conquer me?
Or but my soul perfidious,
Struggling from bondage to be free?

THE CHILDREN'S WARD.

A few smiles and many tears,
Much love, the greatest need;
To little children all are peers,
No caste and but one creed.

A WAKEFUL NIGHT.

The stars within the heavens deep,
Gaze down with cold and evil eye
To mock me, for the God of Sleep
For punishment, has passed me by.
The frogs and crickets loudly wheeze;
I'm sure the moon is made of cheese,
The rich cream from the Milky Way,

* * * *

Thank God, at last my friend, the Day.

AT DAWN.

The stars have faded to an ashen grey,
Where once they hung like jewels in the sky,
And diamonds tremble on each blade of grass,
Or in the hearts of drowsy blossoms lie.

The east is rosy where the gold dawn sleeps,
The birds are making ready for wild flight;
Like incense is the breath of dew-washed earth,
The holy benediction of the night.

THE TYPHOID'S DREAM.

I wandered through the mystic, dusky night,
With but one bright star gleaming in the sky
To guide my footsteps with its silv'ry light;
('Twas but the winking of my night-lamp's eye.)

And dark-eyed houris bearing jars of jade,
Seductive creatures scantily clad in silk,
Gave me to drink of nectar newly made,
(My nurse, with that eternal glass of milk.)

The laughing nymphs within their jasper pool,
Laved me in their sweet-scented, crystal plunge,
And led me to a ferny grotto cool:
(Curses, it's time for my three-hourly sponge!)

FROM MY WINDOW.

I gaze into that mystery called the sky—
Surrounded by its halo of blue hills—
And wonder why we live and love and die
Why some may always smile while others cry
And why this heritage of human ills?

But when, at velvet night, the mystery's gay
With quivering worlds still unconceived by man,
I know that very far we cannot stray,
For we're but little children at our play,
A tiny, living part of One Great Plan.

LEAVING THE HOSPITAL.

When first I came for needed care
It seemed I could not stay,
For everywhere on every side
The sick and suffering lay;
But after weeks within these walls
Where all is peace and rest,
I'm like the little unfledged bird
Thrust rudely from his nest.

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TAPS.

The beads of sweat
On clammy brow.

The ever-short'ning, shallow breath,
The ashen face,
The staring eyes,
All augur fast-approaching death.

His heart is still,
His breathing ends
With gurgling, throaty rattle, odd,
He stiffens, quivers,
Limply falls;
His soul has gone to meet its God !

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